

10 June 2012  
Pentecost 2  
The Confirmation of Samantha Knox

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church  
Vienna, VA

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“Binding the One Who Bound Us to Set Us Free”  
Text: Genesis 3:8-15; Mark 3:20-35; 2 Corinthians 4:13-5:1

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

When God created Adam and Eve in the beginning, their fellowship with Him was perfect and complete. *But now they hid themselves.* In the beginning, they loved their God and Father above all else. *But now they feared Him.* And whereas in the beginning this man and woman had pure joy and pleasure in one another and in the creation that had been given them to enjoy, *now was the boney finger of accusation and blame. They had changed. They had fallen. They were in bondage to sin.*

God hadn't changed. He still comes to His dear children, still loves them, still seeks fellowship with them. But their closeness had now become distance, and instead of rejoicing in who they were and how God had made them, they were now ashamed. They had changed. They had fallen. They were in bondage to sin.

***What is this you have done?*** God asked His daughter. She was probably wondering the same thing. Things were so different now. Not better, as the serpent - as satan - had promised. Oh, if only she could take it back, she would! If she could just undo what she had done . . .

You've been there. So have I. When you thought sin would give you what you wanted, but it didn't. *It just made things worse.* When you acted or spoke impulsively, and then wished you could take those words back, or undo what you just did. *But it was too late.* When you thought and believed that your words or deeds wouldn't hurt anything - but they did, *and now everything was different.* And you just want to hide, or blame someone else. ***What is this you have done?***

What Adam and Eve felt at that moment was their bondage to sin . . . and they didn't like it one bit. Satan promised them the world but gave them nothing. They had been duped, and now they couldn't do anything about it. Hiding didn't work, for they couldn't hide from their own heart and conscience and shame. Blame didn't work, those words were so hollow and *they* probably didn't even believe them as they were speaking them! They couldn't make it right. There was nothing

they could do. They had changed. They had fallen. They were in bondage to sin.

And so their Father comes to them, to His frightened children, for they could no longer go to Him. For what would He think? What would He do? They had ruined everything.

And so their Father comes to them, but more importantly, He comes for them. And when He finds them, He speaks words that must have astonished them for their sweetness. They hear that *their* enemy is *His* enemy. Their Father is on their side. He curses the serpent, not them, and then He promises that one would come and do something about this, about their bondage. The enemy would be dealt a critical blow to his head. The one issuing this blow would not go unscathed, but comparatively, the blow to Him would not be as serious or severe - a blow to the heel, not to the head. And the one to do this would not be Adam or Eve, for only one not in bondage could break this bondage. But it would be a man to set men free. A man from Eve but not from Adam - one of her offspring only.

And so their Father would undo what they had done. And in that faith, they began to live again. In that faith, they were *already* being set free from their bondage to sin. In that faith, they would have children and look for that day when God would act for them and for their salvation. They knew not when it would be, but they knew it would be. Their Father, who made them, now made a promise to them. And they knew He would keep it.

*That keeping* is what the people in Jesus' day were witnessing. Demons were being cast out. They didn't know why and they didn't know how. They wanted, in fact, to seize Jesus - to throw a straight-jacket on Him and bind Him, because they didn't understand what was going on. And it frightened them. What Jesus was doing frightened them, but maybe even more was the appearance and existence of all these demonic spirits that they, perhaps, didn't even know were there. Suddenly, they're all around - all over the place. All of a sudden, there is a spiritual battle going on and either it's real and very, very scary, or Jesus is just a crazy man and out of His mind. *Sooo . . . let's go with crazy - that seems safer, and easier to handle!*

And isn't that the choice many make today? To regard Jesus and His word as crazy rather than face the reality of sin, of death, of evil, and of our bondage to these things? *Let's go with crazy*, and rely on the wisdom and reason of men. *That seems safer, and easier to handle.*

But Jesus replies - *very sanely and clearly* - that what they are witnessing is the binding of the one who has put them in bondage. What they are witnessing is the undoing of the old, evil foe. The stronger one has come and what is frightening is

not what Jesus is doing, but if Jesus did nothing! And so Jesus is not out of His mind - He is, in fact, the only one in His right mind. The only one not blinded by sin. The only one who can see things as they really are. Who can see the bondage we cannot see. Who can see the danger we cannot see. And who has come to do something about it.

And that is not frightening, but **good**. Those are words that - like with Adam and Eve - should astonish us with their sweetness. For though they could not seize and bind Jesus that day, He *would* allow Himself to be seized and bound another day, when the time was right. Another day, when He would not be straight-jacketed, but nailed to the cross. *That* binding not to *stop* what He came to do, but to *accomplish* it. For through the binding of Christ on the cross, in death, and in the grave, Jesus was setting us free. For He was bound with *our* sin, died *our* death, and was sealed in *our* grave, so that in His resurrection, all that now holds us captive and in bondage be broken, and we be set free. Free in the forgiveness of our sins.

For truly, forgiveness is the freedom that we need. This battle is a spiritual one, not physical. The chains satan seeks to enslave us with are not of iron, but the chains of sin and fear and shame. And when we sin, when we listen to the lies and give in to the temptations, we are choosing bondage. And any momentary pleasure soon melts away and we are left not better off, but worse. Just like Adam and Eve.

But just as God came to and for His frightened children in the Garden, so now He comes to and for us in His Word and Sacraments to give us what we need. To give us the freedom of forgiveness Jesus won for us in His death and resurrection. And so when you are baptized, when you are absolved, when you receive the Body and Blood of your Saviour, what Jesus described in the Gospel today is happening "in real time" - the strong man is being bound, and his house plundered. For in these things is the power of God. In these things are the promises of God. And with these things, these means of grace, we have nothing to fear. For here, God is for us, and our Saviour setting us free.

And so by grace through faith, just like Adam and Eve, we begin to live again. By grace through faith, we are being set free from our bondage to sin. By grace through faith, we see that in Jesus, the day of salvation has come. Your Father promised, and His Word is sure and true.

This is what Samantha has learned over the course of her catechism instruction - that from beginning to end, it's all about Jesus. That in Him all the promises of God are fulfilled, and in Him we have life, for in Him, we have the forgiveness of our sins. And that's what it's all about. You may be rich, but if you have not forgiveness, your riches are worthless. You may have power, but if you have not forgiveness, your power will turn to weakness in death. You may have popularity, but if you

have not forgiveness, you will stand alone on the last day. Whatever you have now, whatever you think is worth your life, if you have not forgiveness, it is all for naught. For as St. Paul said, ***the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.***

But that also means (taking this a bit further) that all those other things you see in your life - your afflictions, your troubles, your struggles, your pains, your sadness, even your death - are all transient as well. These things will not last. But your Saviour, His life, His kingdom, and His forgiveness, are eternal.

And though you cannot see the glory of His kingdom and power and forgiveness now, but see only words on a page, water in a font, and bread and wine on an altar - don't think like those in Jesus' day, that He is crazy and out of his mind, and this is all hooey. Maybe that's easier and safer, but it's not better. That would be frightening, if Jesus were not here, coming to us and working for us and forgiving us. For on our own, we are no match for the strong, demonic one.

But this is not all hooey. No, Jesus has bound Himself and His forgiveness to these means, to these physical things, so that we know exactly where to go for forgiveness, for the strength of our Lord, for freedom from the tentacles of the evil one. That we hide in fear and shame no more, but know instead that we are children of our heavenly Father, and brothers and sisters of our Saviour Jesus Christ. For in coming here and receiving the forgiveness of our Saviour, we are ***doing the will of God***, and are, therefore, ***Jesus' brothers and sisters***. And there is no higher honor. Not even for Jesus' mother Mary! Or as the early church father St. Augustine wrote: *Mary is more blessed in receiving the faith of Christ than in conceiving the flesh of Christ* (ACCS, Mark, NT vol. 2, p 48). And so it is for you.

And so it is for you, Samantha, as you have received this faith of Christ in Holy Baptism, have learned of all that He has done for you, and will continue to grow in this faith as you repent of your sins, receive His forgiveness, and now receive the Body and Blood of your Saviour. Nothing you do will be more important. Nothing you do will be of more value. And we are delighted that you believe this and will make this confession today, following in the footsteps of St. Paul, who said: ***I believed, and so I spoke. We also believe, and so we speak.***

Satan is not happy today. He is never happy when sins are forgiven, when He is stripped of His work and His power is bound through our Lord's Word and Sacrament. And so He will persist in and increase His attacks against you, Samantha, and against us all. He does not grow weary and tired as we do. But fear not, and do not lose heart. For again, as St. Paul said, ***though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison.***

***An eternal weight of glory.*** Or perhaps, in other words, a return to the way things were. In the beginning. When the weight we feel is no longer the bondage of sin, but the glory of Christ, given to you. Us weak ones made strong, and the strong one made weak. And where the question ***What is this you have done?*** will never be asked again. For what you have done is forgiven, what satan has done is defeated, and what Christ has done is forever. And Christ will be all in all.

God bless you Samantha, dear sister in Christ, as you believe and speak and make this great confession.

In the Name of the Father and of the (+) Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.